**Dogon active and stative verbs**
Jeffrey Heath
last update December 2014

**active (aspect-marking) versus stative**

Many Dogon languages morphologically distinguish **active** (dynamic) from **stative**
verbs. Active verbs distinguish perfective from imperfective aspects by inflectional
suffixes, while statives do not. Many verbs, especially those denoting stance (including
carrying position) and putting on clothing have both active paradigms (denoting changes
of state) and stative paradigms (denoting resulting states). Other verbs, including most
transitives other than 'carry/hold' and 'wear (garment)' verbs, have no stative forms.
There are usually a few defective, stative-only quasi-verbs with senses like locational
'be', 'be in', 'have', 'want', 'like/love', and 'know'. Some quasi-verbs used in
comparatives ('be more than') are also arguably of this type.

      There are three distinct basic **negative suffixes** on verbs: a) perfective negative
and b) imperfective negative for active verbs, and c) stative negative. Since statives have
their own negation and do not allow aspectual marking, it is difficult to identify
morphological links between statives either perfective or imperfective aspect for active
verbs.

      Both active and stative verbs take pronominal-subject (agreement) suffixes, which
follow any mood-aspect-negation inflectional suffixes. In a few languages, third person
suffixes differ in form from active to stative paradigms. Active and stative stems may
both also be followed by a past-tense particle or clitic, which in several languages is itself
conjugated for pronominal subject. The past marking is especially useful for stative
verbs, compensating for the absence of perfectivity marking.

      Statives derived from relative actives typically show a change in stem vocalism,
i.e. ablaut. In this case, the stative often has the A/O-stem, i.e. the stem ends in *a* or *o*.
Nanga examples are *èwò* 'be sitting (seated)' and *àgà* 'be holding', versus active forms
(with mediopassive suffix) *éw-yò* 'sit down' and *ágí-yà* 'take hold'.

      Stative verbs are distinct from suffixally derived **mediopassive** verbs such as 'sit
(down)', 'hold (something)', and 'wear (garment)'. Mediopassives have complete active
paradigms (in particular, they distinguish perfective from imperfective aspects); see the
separate piece on "Dogon mediopassive transitive and causative verb derivation".
However, mediopassive verbs usually have stative counterparts, as illustrated for Nanga
in the preceding paragraph. The mediopassive suffix is normally omitted in the stative
except as noted below.

      In some languages, all attested stative verbs are bisyllabic, or rarely monosyllabic
*Cv:-* (bimoraic, with long vowel). This is evidently an output constraint on the form of
statives. *Cv-yv* mediopassives keep the mediopassive suffix *-yv* in the stative, while

*CvCv-yv* mediopassives (and other *CvCv-Cv* derivatives) drop the suffix to form the stative. A few Dogon languages do allow occasional trisyllabic statives, but most do not.

Tommo So examples of statives derived from actives (usually mediopassive) are in (1). Note the bimoraic statives.

(1)      active          stative          gloss

     *dànn-íyɛ́*      *dáà*        'sit'
     *íŋɛ́-ndɛ́*       *íŋè*        'stand, stop'
     *dààb-íyɛ́*      *dábà*       'lie down'    [Tommo So]

Tommo So underived stative quasi-verbs, with no corresponding active form and therefore no possibility of perfectivity marking, are in (2). Some (those shown with =) are enclitic. All can be conjugated suffixally for pronominal subject agreement, like other active and stative verbs. Negative forms have a variant of the stative negative *-lv* or are suppletive.

(2)      stative          stative negative          gloss

     *=wɔ*        *òndú*            'is' (locational)
     *=kɔ̂*        *òndú*            'is' (locational, speaker present)
     *=yɔ̂*        *òndú*            'is' (locational, nonproximate)
     *=be*        *=be-lí*          'was' (locational)
     *tô:*        *tò:-lɛ́*          'be in'
     *sɛ*         *sè-lɛ́*           'have'
     *m̀bɛ́*       *m̀bɛ́-lɛ́*         'like, love'
     *námá*       *nàmà-lɛ́*         'want'
     *íí ~ íg*     *ínnɛ*            'know'      [Tommo So]

Tommo So 'like/love', 'want', and 'know' have some grammatical characteristics of adjectival predicates.

**reduplication and the existential proclitic with statives**

In positive main clauses that do not have a focalized NP or other non-verb constituent, some Dogon languages require that a stative verb derived from an active verb be either **initially reduplicated** (*Cv-*) or preceded by an **existential proclitic** of the form *yv́* (e.g. *yɛ́*). These two devices are generally associated with verb or clause-level focalization. Stative quasi-verbs like 'be' and 'have', see below, do not reduplicate but regularly take the existential proclitic under certain conditions.

The existential proclitic and its functions are described in a separate piece.

**'be (somewhere)'**

'Be' in the locational (and by extension existential) sense, as in 'X is here' and 'X exists (there is some X)', is a stative quasi-verb that does not correspond to any active verb. For identical copula 'it is X', see the separate piece "Dogon identificational *it is*". Except in Bunoge, locational 'be' is obligatorily preceded by the existential clitic (usually *yv́*) in positive main clauses with no other constituent focalized, unless an overt locational expression is present. Examples are Jamsay *yɔ́ wɔ̀* 'he/she is present', *yɔ́ kɔ̀* 'it is present' or 'there is some'.

Locational 'be' has a single positive stem in most Dogon languages, reconstructible as \*bo or something similar. However, in a block of eastern languages there is a binary opposition between a **human or animate** form *wv* and a **nonhuman or inanimate** form *kv*, at least in positive clauses, where "v" is a variable vowel. (Whether the feature is ±human or ±animate varies by language.)

Negative 'not be'or 'be absent' is suppletive in some languages. In other it is a combination of the positive form plus a variant of the stative negative suffix (*-lv*, *-rv*, *-ndv*). (1) pulls the forms together. Forms not marked for humanity or animacy are located centrally. Tone-markings for the positive forms are those heard after the existential proclitic (if there is one), and some L-toned forms shift to H-tone in other positions (such as relative-clause participles). Parenthesized forms are marginal or dialectal.

| (1) | 'be (sw), exist' | | 'not be (sw), not exist' | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Hum/An | Nonh/Inan | Hum/An | Nonh/Inan |
| eastern | | | | |
| Jamsay | *wɔ̀* | *kɔ̀* | *wɔ̀:-rɔ́* | *kɔ̀:-rɔ́* |
| Togo Kan | *wɔ̀* | *kɔ̀* | *wɔ̀:-rɔ́* | *kɔ̀:-rɔ́* |
| Yorno So | *wɔ̀* | *kɔ̀* | *wɔ̀-lɔ́* | *kɔ̀-lɔ́* |
| Tomo Kan | *wɔ́* | *kɔ́* | *wɔ̀:-lɔ̀* | *kɔ̀:-lɔ̀* |
| Donno So | *wɔ̀* | *(kɔ̀)* | *wɔ̀-lɔ́* | *(kɔ̀-lɔ́)* |
| Tommo So | *wɔ̂* | *kɔ̂* | *òndú* | |
| Toro Tegu | | *wɔ́* | *yâŋgó* | |
| Ben Tey | | *bù* | *ŋ̀gó* | |
| Bankan Tey | | *bù* (3Sg *bù-n*) | *ŋ̀gǒ:* | |
| Nanga | | *bù* | *ŋ̀gó* | |

northwestern

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Najamba | *bó* | *òndú ~ òndí* |
| Tiranige | *wò* | *órâ* |
| Dogul Dom | *bó* | *bù-nnú* |
| Tebul Ure | *bù* | *ŋ̀gó* |
| Yanda Dom | *bó* | *ònú* |

southwestern

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Bunoge | *bò* | *ʔórì* |
| Mombo | *bó:* | *ólì* |
| Ampari | *bó* | *ɔ́rù* |
| Penange | *bó* | *wŏl* |

The *w/k* alternations probably reflect a historically secondary interaction between 'be' and third person pronouns. A possible trigger for this might have been an accidental phonetic merger or near-merger between \*bo 'be' and human/animate 3Sg pronoun \*wo or \*wɔ due to lenition of \*b to *w*.

In most of the languages there is a suppletive past tense form *be* or *bɛ* 'was (somewhere)', often with its own stative negative form (*bè-lé, bè-lɛ́*, or similar). This morpheme is also added to active verbs and to both derived and underived statives to displace the reference time into the past. This permits expression of the past perfect ('had eaten') and in the past imperfective ('was eating') of active verbs, and of past statives ('was lying down', 'had/used to have a house').

**'have' quasi-verb**

This stative quasi-verb is preceded by the existential proclitic in positive main clauses without a focalized constituent, even if a locational expression is overt.

(2)                         'have'         'not have'

eastern

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Toro Tegu | *sá* | *sà-rá* |
| Ben Tey | *só* | *sò-ló* |
| Bankan Tey | *só* | *sò-ndó* |
| Nanga | *sò* | *sò-ndó* |
| Jamsay | *sà* | *sà:-rá* |
| Tommo So | *sɛ́* | *sè-lɛ́* |
| Donno So | *sè* | *sè-lɛ́* |

4

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Togo Kan | *sà* | *sà:-rá* |
| Yorno So | *sè* | *sè-lέ* |
| Tomo Kan | *sá* | *sà:-là* |
| northwestern | | |
| Najamba | *jógò* | *jògò-ndí* |
| Tiranige | *sâ:* | *sà:-nà* |
| Dogulu | *jɔ́* | *jù-nnú* |
| Tebul Ure | *sɔ̀* | *sɔ́-ndɔ̀* |
| Yanda Dom | *zó* | *zò-ń* |
| southwestern | | |
| Bunoge | *sà* | *sà:-ndà* |
| Mombo | *sá:* | *sá:-ndá* |
| Ampari | *sò* | *sò:-ndá* |
| Penange | *sá$^n$* | *sá:-ndá* |

The 'have' quasi-verb is similar or identical phonologically to one of the perfective inflectional suffixes in some Dogon languages. This perfective tends to have resultative meanings and it tends to be common in relative clauses, but the details differ from language to language. To the extent that this perfective suffix is recognizably identical to the 'have' quasi-verb in a given language, we might take it to be an auxiliary verb rather than an ordinary inflectional suffix. Alternatively, but less plausibly, we could take 'have' as a perfective form of a phonologically null verb stem.

**'know' and 'want' quasi-verbs**

'Know' is a regular active verb morphologically in some Dogon languages (Jamsay *jùgɔ́* and cognates). In others this sense is expressed by a stative quasi-verb that has no active counterpart. The situation is similar with 'want/like', except that fewer languages have a regular active verb (such as Jamsay *dèné*) with this sense. The semantic distinction between 'want' and 'like/love' is blurry.

For those languages that have stative quasi-verbs, the quasi-verbs are listed in (3). Regular active verbs are omitted. In some languages the positive 'know' quasi-verb requires a following 'be' quasi-verb (*wɔ̀* etc.). As with 'be', the corresponding negative forms 'not know' and 'not want' in various languages are morphologically transparent (with stative negative suffix), have a suppletive stem (with stative negative suffix), or are opaque portmanteaus. In Penange, positive 'know' and 'want' have different stems for 3rd and 1st/2nd person subjects, the former requiring the 'be' quasi-verb. Parenthesized forms appear to end in the mediopassive suffix, which would make then active verbs.

(3)                           'know'      'not know'    'want/like'        'not want'

eastern

| | 'know' | 'not know' | 'want/like' | 'not want' |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Toro Tegu | *ùkú* | *ínà* | *ìwá* | *yⁿà-rⁿá* |
| Ben Tey | — | — | *(má:-yí)* | *mì-rá* |
| Bankan Tey | — | — | *m̀bǎ:* | *m̀bì-rá* |
| Nanga | — | — | *ùmbá ~ m̀bá* | *m̀bù-rá* |
| Jamsay | — | — | — | — |
| Jamsay-Perge | — | — | *ùmbɔ́* | *ùm-ná* |
| Tommo So | *íí* | *ínnè* | *ḿbɛ́* | *nàmà-lɛ́* |
| Donno So | *ìgù wɔ́* | *ìnnɛ́* | *íbɛ́, nàmà* | *ìbè-lá, nàmà-lá* |
| Togo Kan | *í:ⁿ wɔ̀* | *ínɛ́* | *ìyɔ̂:* | *ìyè-lá* |
| Yorno So | *ígì, ígɔ́-ɔ́* | *ínè:* | *(íb-ɛ́:, náwⁿ-ɛ́:)* | *ìbè-lá, nàwⁿè-lá* |
| Tomo Kan | ==xxx== | ==xxx== | ==xxx== | ==xxx== |

northwestern

| | 'know' | 'not know' | 'want/like' | 'not want' |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Najamba | *tígà* | *éndà:* | *kíyò* | *ké-là* |
| Tiranige | *yèy* | *yè-nì* | *cèy* | *cè-là* |
| Dogulu | *tìgá* | *(tìgì-yè-lɛ́)* | *námà, (ìbì-yé)* | ==xxx== |
| Tebul Ure | — | — | *m̀bá* | *m̀bí-là:* |
| Yanda Dom | — | — | *èbà bó* | *èbù-lá* |

southwestern

| | 'know' | 'not know' | 'want/like' | 'not want' |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bunoge | *èyⁿ* | *ʔìndò* | *kàyⁿ* | *kà:-là* |
| Mombo | *íɲì* | *índó* | *námmì* | ==xxx== |
| Ampari | *éyⁿ* | *éy-ndò* | ==xxx== | ==xxx== |
| Penange | *ɛ́ɲɔ̀ bò* (3rd) *ɲéyⁿ* (1st/2nd) | *índó* | *kéɲù bò* (3rd) *kéyⁿ* (1st/2nd) | *kéy-là* |

**Jamsay**

This language, and specifically its mainstream dialect (spoken with little variation from near Douentza to the Mondoro area), is notable for the infrequency of derived statives. This correlates with the absence of a productive mediopassive suffix for active verbs.

Aside from the quasi-verbs 'have' and locational 'be', Jamsay has few stative forms (definable as verb-like stems that cannot mark perfectivity). 'Know' and 'want' are expressed by active verbs in this language. The most common statives besides 'have' and 'be' are those in (4), shown in their unreduplicated forms. The segments of the active verb are preserved in (4a), which is actually unusual in view of the preference in other languages for statives ending in *a/o*. The stative in (4b) shows a consistent consonant-final form, not found elsewhere in the verbal lexicon. The statives in (4c) are

intransitivized vis-à-vis the transitive active forms, and appear to be phonologically truncated. The stative in (4d) is suppletive.

(4)       active       gloss                      stative       gloss

    a.   *dìgɛ́*     'join, connect X'    *dìgɛ̀*     'X be connected'
    b.   *kúnó*    'put X (somewhere)'    *kùn*     'X be (put) in(side)'
    c.   *ná:ná*    'put X up (on sth)'    *nà:*     'X be up on (sth)'
        *dìŋé*    'X sit (down)'    *dà:$^n$*    'X be sitting (seated)'
            [cf. *dè:né* 'put X down', an archaic causative of 'sit']
    d.   *ìŋé*     'X lie down'    *ùmò*     'X be lying down'

In unfocalized positive main clauses, these derived statives can either be reduplicated or can be preceded by existential proclitic *yɛ́ ~ yɔ́*. Negation is with stative negative *-lá* (*dìgɛ̀-lá* etc.), except that *kùn* has negative form *kùn-ó*.

**Toro Tegu**

Instead of a simple derived stative verb stem that can take regular pronominal-subject conjugation, xToro Tegu has a **periphrastic** stative construction using 'be' as auxiliary. The main verb occurs in its combining form with high vowel, as in verb chains. It is optionally reduplicated. This verb is followed by *dà* 'be' or (for transitive verbs) *dĕn dà*. For example *dìŋé* 'sit (down)' has a stative form with 3Sg subject *dì-díŋú d-ɔ̌:* 'he/she is sitting (=seated)'.

      The construction is negated by substituting suppletive *ǹgó* 'not be' for positive *dà*.
      Toro Tegu therefore goes farther than other languages in combining a stative verb stem periphrastically with the 'be' quasi-verb as auxiliary. However, in (3) above we saw that several languages combine the 'know' quasi-verb with auxiliary 'be' in positive utterances.